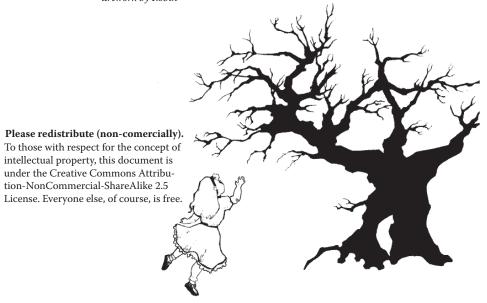
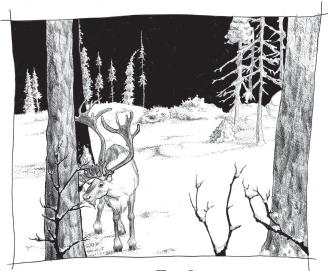
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THE ILLAWEN a fable of early empire

grown man. She thus remained unnoticed.

ceremonial coal, and the next day they struck.

As the ember-bearer walked past a cliff, an elder girl from among the *Illawen* cast a spear into his leg with her atlatl. The *Jakkiolenna* hunters set out at once to find the antagonist, but the girl hid in the recess of a tree too small for a full-

the Illawen set about their work.
When a tribe was on the move, one man was given the role of ember-bearer. He carried a special shell wrapped in hide, which bore embers as seed for the next night's fires. The Illawen sent a scout to identify the carrier of the

they never wavered from their path. With unforeseeable haste they came upon the trail of the Jakkiolenna, and

THE JOURNEY WAS A DANGEROUS ONE FOR THE CHILDREN. THEY HAD LITTLE to eat and only their passion for warmth, but the moon cast light on them and

woman's eyes shot open and saw for the last time. Illakkes spoke: "You ought not have allowed this."

shadow the Jakkiolenna as they traveled.

Before they left, Illakkes went to the tent of her mentor. While the high priestess slept, her student crept upon her, bone dagger in hand. The older

the refuge of cowards and tyrants, but the bold may walk under the moon." And thus were the Illawen—the dark-helpers—born. When their parents packed carts of taxed meat to deliver to their governors, the Illawen stole much of it for themselves. Winter was coming, and the tribes were headed south to the woods where the reindeer grazed until spring. The Illawen planned to

while the rest of the youth watched on.

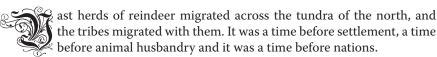
Illa possessed a boy of nine and answered in a pre-pubescent voice: "Fire is

to fifteen, gathered in the tent of Illakkes. Illakkes—a fifteen-year-old priestess-in-training—followed Illa, goddess of the dark, earth and owl. Illa was quite displeased; meat intended for sacrifice to her birds was being given to the Jakkiolenna instead, and Illa had grown lean. "Oh Illa, how can we break from this tyranny?" Illakkes asked her patron,

As is the manner of children, the children of the Sekkiolummi, aged eight more given to passion. One night, the children of the Sekkiolummi, aged eight

felt that they had no option.

Within a year, every tribe was paying tribute to the Jakkiolenna. Each begrudged the levy but had their own survival to think of; they could not spare any hunters for war. Nor could they deviate from the path of the herds. They



The tribes would skirmish whenever two converged on one herd by accident, but the results were far from disastrous. Most often, the weaker tribe conceded without a fight, though sometimes they would raise the banners of war. On these rare instances, the larger tribe usually left rather than face such a risk to their people. Occasionally, neither side backed down and many, usually brash young hunters, would be injured or killed.

Prisoners were incorporated into the victorious tribe, a practice that kept the bloodlines diverse and strong.

This had been going on since the time before time. And, of course, one tribe almost ruined it for everyone.

THE JAKKIOLENNA WERE THE MOST POWERFUL TRIBE IN ALL THEIR FROZEN world, and so sure were they of their power that they eventually refused to

and allowed them to keep a portion of these taxes.

tormed.

The Sekkiolummi agreed to enforce the law of tribute upon any tribe they encountered. In exchange, the Jakkiolenna agreed not to kill the Sekkiolummi,

chief of the Sekkiolummi laughed.

But as the cold and truth of night set in, the chief began to listen to the poisonous words of empire, and soon the first political alliance was

as the sacrificial fire took an elderly reindeer.
"I offer you the chance to serve the Jakkiolenna," the emissary spoke, and the

The tribe sent an emissary to track the *Sekkiolummi*, the second largest tribe of the tundra. Their emissary reached the *Sekkiolummi* at the edge of the great North Ocean; he was escorted into camp as the sun began to set over the water,

his tribe only to grow.

Previously, when something of this nature would occur, a tribe's priestess would dictate that more children should be sacrificed to Bear, Wolf and Raven. But the Jakkiolenna worshipped Iksi, a god of light and fire, a god who wanted

itself nomadically.

back down from any fight. As they won battle after battle, they brought more prisoners into their midst and soon the tribe was growing too large to sustain

*Jakkiolenna*'s guard as he crept into their camp. His body was taken to the priestess of Iksi, who stripped his clothes and revealed his chest. A black sun was tattooed on his sternum, a perfect circle surrounded by eight triangular rays.

"Illa," she said, "this boy serves Illa. Tonight we sacrifice an owl."

But the attacks did not relent, for a god's power is not found only in symbols.

When the *Jakkiolenna* reached the winter woods, the *Sekkiolummi*, their only allies, were nowhere to be found. The other tribes, temporarily united, struck them down. The few imperial survivors were distributed amongst the coalition and the *Jakkiolenna* were no more.

"What of our people," one young *Illawen* asked of Illakkes upon her return, "what of the *Sekkiolummi*?"

"The gods direct us," she replied, "and when we don't listen, we are lost. Our parents are lost, and we shall seek them."

The *Illawen* set out north, toward the sea, to search for their parents. Led by a young woman on the back of a dark gray reindeer, they were never heard from again. Some say they died, of course, and others say they didn't.

than meat. And then you shall know that they are weak." While she was away, one Illawen boy was speared in the moonlight by the

news of the weakened Jakkiolenna. "Ask them," she suggested, "if they would not prefer a tribute of fire rather

themselves. Illakkes visited tribe after tribe over the course of those months, bringing the

and the tribe grew weak from lack of sustenance and rest. Illakkes—no ordinary priestess—befriended an old stag reindeer, his hide as dark as midnight snow. One night she rode off, leaving the *Illawen* in charge of

the camp, until the tribe reinforced the watch.

But after several sleepless nights, the *Jakkiolenna* were too exhausted to hunt and they were forced to relax their guard. The fires were extinguished again,

death, and only through great effort was a new fire begun.

The *Illawen* harried the *Jakkiolenna* incessantly for months, killing a few ember-bearers and a few sentries. At night they would extinguish the flames of

and stole off with it.

That night the wounded man succumbed to his blood loss, a slow and painful

While the imperial hunters ran in blind pursuit, a boy of eight walked calmly into the midst of the remaining tribespeople, found the leather-wrapped coal